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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001220

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN ELECTS A WOMAN AS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
SPEAKER

REF: A. 07 ISLAMABAD 5388

[1](#)B. LAHORE 088

[1](#)C. ISLAMABAD 327

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Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On March 19, the National Assembly voted to elect Pakistan's first female Speaker of the National Assembly. Dr. Fahmida Mirza is a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) parliamentarian from Sindh and a respected women's rights advocate. The PPP's choice for Deputy Speaker, Faisal Kareem Kundi, is a young politician from the Northwest Frontier Province NWFP), who defeated Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) leader Fazlur Rehman in his home town. Pakistan Muslim League (PML) heavyweight Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi--who expected to be prime minister--will lead the opposition. By choosing representatives from Sindh and the NWFP as Speaker and Deputy Speaker, the PPP will now claim that the Prime Minister must be from Punjab. This would effectively end Sindhi PPP leader Amin Faheem's chances to become Prime Minister. The choice of a woman and a young anti-religious party leader is intended to reflect Benazir's own anti-extremist legacy. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On March 17 the PPP nominated Mirza and Kundi as their candidates for Speaker of the National Assembly and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, respectively. The National Assembly voted the two into office on March 19. The PML selected the former Chief Minister of Punjab, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi, as the National Assembly Opposition Leader.

The New Female Speaker

[1](#)3. (SBU) Dr. Fahmida Mirza won National Assembly seats on PPP tickets in 1997, 2002, and 2008. From Sindh, she is also a longtime Benazir loyalist, and her husband reportedly is a close friend of PPP Co-Chair Asif Zardari. Like PPP leader Sherry Rehman, Mirza is a women's rights activist who had advanced pro-women legislation during her time in the National Assembly--she was one of the driving forces for legislation to amend the Hudood Ordinances.

[1](#)4. (SBU) During the last National Assembly session, Mirza was a member of the Committee on Culture and Tourism. She also worked on decreasing poverty and providing clean drinking

water to her constituency by installing water purification plants. Before her election to the National Assembly in February 2002, Mirza was elected Information Secretary for the PPP in Sindh.

15. (SBU) Dr. Mirza was born December 20, 1956 in Karachi and is known as an intellectual, an agriculturist, and a businesswoman. A medical graduate from Liaquat Medical College in Jamshoro (1982), before entering politics she ran an advertising agency named Information Communication Limited (ICL). Mirza belongs to a fraternity of other female writers. She is married to sugar mill owner and former National Assembly member Zulfiqar Mirza. They have four children: two sons and two daughters.

The New Deputy Speaker

16. (SBU) Faisal Kareem Kundi comes from a well-known political family in D.I. Khan, and he defeated Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) leader Fazlur Rehman by a large majority (35,000 votes) in the recent parliamentary elections. Kundi is young--approximately 33 years old--and has a law degree from a university in the United Kingdom. Since the election, Kundi has been a vocal opponent of any alliance between the PPP and the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) religious bloc. Kundi's family members are landholders and mid-sized industrialists who have been traditional political rivals of Fazlur Rehman.

Opposition Party Leader

17. (SBU) Embassy has reported extensively on Pervaiz Elahi (Refs A-C). Former Chief Minister of Punjab from 2002-2007, Elahi expected to become Prime Minister before the PML's

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electoral defeat. Elahi runs the PML with his cousin and brother-in-law, PML President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain. Elahi entered local politics in 1983 and by 1986 won a seat in the Punjab Provincial Assembly; he served repeatedly as a Provincial Minister for Local Government and Rural Development (1985-88, 1988-90, 1990-93). From 1993 to 1996 he served as Deputy Opposition Leader and was elevated to the post of Speaker of the Provincial Assembly after the PML's victory in 1997.

18. (C) Elahi comes from a politically influential industrial Punjab family commonly called the "Chaudhrys of Gujrat" (Chaudhry is an honorific title for a landowner), a family that traditionally has rivaled the Sharif family for political influence in Punjab. Elahi belonged to Nawaz Sharif's inner circle in the 1990's, but the relationship began to sour after the 1997 election when Sharif made his brother Shahbaz the Punjab Chief Minister rather than Elahi (Ref A). Elahi has been a consistent supporter of Musharraf and his policy of enlightened moderation.

9.(C) Comment: These choices probably spell the end of PPP Sindh leader Amin Faheem's chances of becoming Prime Minister. By naming representatives from Sindh and the NWFP as Speaker and Deputy Speaker, the PPP will now claim that the Prime Minister must be from Punjab, and this will increase the chances the Prime Minister will be either Shah Mehmood Qureshi or Yousef Gillani. The selection of a woman and an young anti-religious leader will no doubt displease the mullahs; it reflects PPP's deliberate intent to carry on Benazir's legacy.

PATTERSON